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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT AL-BASHIR CALLS FOR GREATER NATIONAL UNITY

REF: KHARTOUM 1911

1. (U) SUMMARY: On 31 December, Sudanese President Al-Bashir delivered a speech to the nation to celebrate the 52nd anniversary of Sudanese independence. In the speech, the President stressed the importance of national unity and consensus. He affirmed his commitment to the CPA and alleged peace was alive in Darfur. Al-Bashir also used the occasion to pardon 30 opposition members accused of plotting against his regime and ordered their immediate release. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Highlights from the speech are as follows:

"Independence was achieved through a national consensus which included all political, tribal, ethnic, and religious spectrum. It is therefore imperative to assimilate that consensus, maintain coherence and foster unity by discarding all forms of division and disparity and focus on all that secures the unity and will of our nation and rally its energies for the struggle for reconstruction, progress, and development."

"It is my firm intention to root out all causes of slackness, shortcomings, and negligence in all government facilities and bodies. I look forward to a revolution which targets all forms of apathy, indiscipline, stagnation, and corruption."

"I have always maintained that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on January 9th 2005, represents a landmark and a watershed in the history of Sudan . . . This agreement would not have been possible if we had not acknowledged the basic causes of the problem and given it its proper name and diagnosed the infection which is half way through to treatment and healing. Our treatment of the causes has been effective and all-inclusive."

"We make such claim without any illusion of immunity against committing mistakes and without expecting to move forward in accordance to the text and letter of the agreement without some obstacles and differences in understanding and interpretation of the text. We have experienced and witnessed such difficulties and obstacles in the past few days between the two partners to the agreement. Some skeptics believed that it was the beginning of the end to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. They must have been disappointed, for we will never allow a small spark to break out into a big fire that will overwhelm our hope for peace and stability".

"Our ultimate goal is to root out all causes of government sabotage and opposition members who were accused of government sabotage and detained in mid-July. He said that the pardon was aimed at "strengthening national reconciliation and opening a new page." Among those pardoned were members of the Sudanese military, the SPLM, as well as leading opposition figure Ali Mahmud Hussein, vice president of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

14. (SBU) COMMENT. Al-Bashir's acquittal of political detainees was one of the most important aspects of his address to the nation. These exonerations follow the pardoning and release in early December of a key opposition figure, Umma Party Reform and Renewal leader Mubarak al-Fadil al-Mahdi. By releasing the remaining detainees, Al-Bashir seems to be heeding international and domestic pressure to demonstrate political tolerance. With the NCP-SPLM impasse behind him, Al-Bashir's pardons were a means of highlighting publicly that peace partners' relationship is on the mend. As for his other remarks, Al-Bashir hammered the point of national unity and consensus home while ignoring that many obstacles remain in implementing peace between the north and south and in Darfur. END COMMENT.

POWERS